

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following Listing of Claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A stainless steel member passivation treatment method for forming a passive film on a surface of the stainless steel member, said method comprising the steps of:

providing an alkaline solution having a pH of 9 to 12, said alkaline solution comprising a pH buffer;

immersing the stainless steel member in-an the alkaline solution of pH 9 to 12 at 40 to 60°C, while air is being blown into the alkaline solution to form air bubbles;
~~— air bubbling external air into the alkaline solution, added with a pH buffer, or provided with a pH buffer action, whereby that increase~~ the amount of oxygen dissolved in the alkaline solution ~~is increased to~~ and thereby promote the formation of hydroxides constituting the passive film, ~~and by carbon dioxides dissolving in the alkaline solution falling of its pH is suppressed,~~ wherein the hydroxides constituting the passive film are produced from metal ions constituting the stainless steel and hydroxide ions in the alkaline solution, and wherein the pH buffer suppresses a reduction in the pH of the alkaline solution that would otherwise be caused by the dissolution of carbon dioxide into the alkaline solution by the air bubbles; and

after the immersing the stainless steel member step, thermally drying the member ~~is then dried by being held at 100 to 200°C.~~

Claims 2 and 3 (canceled)

Claim 4 (currently amended): A stainless steel member passivation treatment method according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the stainless steel member is a separator for use in a fuel cell.

Claims 5-9 (canceled)